

Customer Contact

Management Board Report - Quarter 1 – 2016/7

This quarter saw the introduction of some new digital services to our customer contact work. Also, following our excellent Helpline customer satisfaction feedback at the end of Q4 2015/6 we carried out further analysis to better understand how effectively we manage demand from customers wanting to raise an information rights concern. This was especially important given the recent increases in formal concerns being referred to the ICO.

Some headlines from these initiatives are as follows:

New 'Nuisance Call' Digital Service

Launched on 17 May this service immediately saw an 80+% increase in the number of nuisance calls reported to us, rising from a weekly average of 2,350 from January to May 2016 to 4,300 through May and June.

Although fluctuations in these volumes are common as the nuisance call industry is more active at certain times of the year, we are confident to attribute the vast majority of this increase to our new service having made the reporting process much quicker and easier.

This is supported by our recent website customer satisfaction exercise which saw 42% of respondents saying their reason for visiting ICO.org.uk was to report nuisance calls and praising the new service for having made this much easier.

New 'Live Chat' Digital Service

Launched at the start of April 2016 this service gives customers the chance to raise enquiries in writing via ICO.org.uk and have them responded to in real time.

The service dealt with just short of 1,000 'chats' during the quarter. Chats took, on average, just 4 or 5 seconds to start and lasted for approximately 10 to 11 minutes.

Most customers using this service did not need to call our Helpline or write to us by email or letter. For these 1,000 customers therefore they received a much faster response than is possible through either of our more traditional contact channels. The time needed for our staff to

respond to these enquiries in writing is also much less than any other written communication channel.

Following such an encouraging pilot, we now intend to promote this service much more widely as a way of increasing our productivity and relevance across our highest volume customer facing services. We also plan to pilot the use of Twitter as an additional customer enquiry channel in the coming quarter.

Reducing unnecessary contacts

This quarter saw a small real terms reduction in calls (approximately 2,000 or 4%) made to our Helpline service compared to traditional levels. Although too soon to describe this as any kind of changing trend, the reduction coincided with the launch of our two new digital services.

- The introduction of the Nuisance Call tool, which now supports the reporting of multiple calls, means fewer customers need to call our Helpline to do this.
- The 1,000 customers who used our Live chat service this quarter will not have needed to call our Helpline in most cases. We also received a traditional amount of enquiries made by email in the period, suggesting that our Live Chat customers were more likely to have been former Helpline customers.

Although we received a traditional number of email enquiries, following work to streamline this process we are now able to respond to an increased proportion of these customers by telephone rather than email. Over 25% of customers who write to us now receive their response by telephone.

Our written advice, Live Chat and Helpline services received 1,000 fewer combined customer contacts than the same period last year, representing a net decrease of between 1.5% and 2%. Although relatively small, this is the first decrease of any kind for a number of years and goes against the wider trend of increased numbers of referrals into our adjudication services. We are therefore optimistic that what we have seen this quarter is the early sign of what might be achieved as more digital services are introduced and we offer our customers, and staff, chance to take advantage of ever more relevant and proportionate communication channels.

Understanding demand from customers with information rights concerns

During a typical week in early June:

- 6,000 separate customers visited the 'concerns' section of ICO.org.uk for advice, (not including the 4,300 who used our nuisance call tool).
- 600 further customers called our Helpline for advice about raising a formal information rights concern.
- Approximately 600 customers submitted a formal information rights concern in writing to us.

This means that approximately 6,000 customers came to us with a problem in the form of an information rights concern, but were able to get what they needed by either self serving on our website or receiving some quick advice from our Helpline 'on the doorstep'.

With only 1 in 11 customers actually submitting a formal concern we can be pleased with our efforts to minimise unnecessary customer contacts. Clearly were we less successful in this area there would be a considerable risk to wider ICO operational performance were a greater proportion of our customers to need to pass beyond our door step and require more costly and time consuming treatment.

It is also important to note that our 'looking for trouble' initiative is alive and well in our Customer Contact services, so we can also be confident that customers with genuine concerns are being encouraged to tell us about them.

Understanding customer journeys for those with information rights concerns

Of the customers who call our Helpline to discuss an information rights concern, 19% said they had visited ICO.org.uk first. Only half of these said they had done so to read our guidance, with the other half saying they were simply looking for our contact details. This suggests that there is a specific, and separate, demand for our Helpline service from customers wanting, and often needing, to discuss their information rights concern. Only in a very few cases is the Helpline dealing with customers unable to find what they need on our website. This is a positive endorsement of both the concerns related information on the website and the work of the Helpline in this area.

Half of those who call the Helpline with an information rights concern have raised it with the organisation involved first. This also means that up to 20,000 customers per year are calling our Helpline having not first

raised their concern with the organisation responsible. Were these customers not able to discuss their concern with us informally the vast majority would go on to submit it to us in writing, creating a significant increase in often unnecessary more time consuming work for our adjudication services.

Around 7% of customers who called our Helpline with an information rights concern said they had raised it with the organisation responsible but were contacting us because, after waiting for a long time, they had still not heard back. This represents about 4,000 customers per year. A better information rights experience for these people may be achievable if we were able to encourage as many organisations as possible to respond to all information rights concerns raised with them in a reasonable timescale.

Dealing with more requests for information about the ICO

We saw a 10% increase in requests for information made to us under FoI and DP compared with the same period last year.

The Information Access service kept pace with this increase as well as responding to 98% of all requests within their statutory deadline, compared with their 95% corporate plan target.

Work was also completed this quarter in readiness for a major proactive disclosure of our operational casework data set. Two years worth of information is being published in July, with this being updated on a regular basis each month moving forward.

Paul Arnold

Head of Customer and Business Services